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Peace activists call for cut in defence budgets

Demand people-centred policies to eradicate poverty from Pakistan, India : Peace activists plant 'Tree of Hope'

OUR STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD – Underlining the need to cut defence spending to increase stability in neighbouring countries, India and Pakistan, the members of the Indian peace delegation and representatives of various civil society organisations agreed to divert resources for social sector development to bring positive change in the lives of people.

In a statement, they also said, "The de-nuclearisation is a must in the region since three generations' development prospects have been destroyed with the persistence of status quo adding that we should not spoil the future of our fourth generation."

Insani Haqooq Ijihad, a network of civil society organisations, Monday hosted a reception in the honour of Indian peace delegation comprising noted journalist Kuldip Nayar, film director Mahesh Bhatt, leading economist and parliamentarian Dr Bhalchandra Mungekar, editor of a leading Indian daily Urdu newspaper Shahid Sid-

diqui, journalist Jatin Desai, Mazher Hussain, Kamla Bhasin, Seema Mustafa, Haris Kidwai, Ramesh Yadev and Sanjay Nahar. Indian peace delegation is currently visiting Pakistan with the objective of giving impetus to the peace-process between the two countries.

They were of the view that in order to end poverty, hunger, violence against women and marginalized sections, exploitation of workers, especially home-based women workers in India and Pakistan, and in fact, in all the SAARC countries, realisation of peace between India and Pakistan is a must.

Before talking to media and representative of civil society organisations, the delegation planted sapling in arts and craft village and named it as "Tree of Hope." The delegation members reiterated that although there were anti-peace forces in both countries, they also agreed that there was a growing realisation among masses and even among the fanatic forces in India such as BJP that stability in



ISLAMABAD: Kaldip Nayar, the head of Indian peace delegation, addressing a press conference at Pothohari Art & Craft Village on Monday.—Staff photo by Syed Mehdi

both neighbouring countries is in South Asian region's interest.

"We, the forces of peace and stability, have significantly de-

feated the forces of fanaticism and extremes," said Janin Desai,

a journalist and National Joint Secretary of Pakistan-India Peo-

ple's Forum for Peace and Democracy, and bureau member of South Asians for Human Rights. Chaudhry Manzoor, MNA (PPP), supported the idea that visa condition among SAARC countries should be abolished. Karamat Hussain from PILER said that the members of SAARC have already ratified a convention in 1987 which called for "suppression of terrorism" among the SAARC countries.

But so far no mechanism has been developed for implementation of the convention, he added. The delegation and the host civil society organisations demanded that the SAARC members must create a mechanism for the convention to end terrorism in the region. They also urged the SAARC countries to make the convention effective. They said that all SAARC countries should give MFN status to each other, which is obligatory under WTO regime.

They demanded that basic human principles should be realised and practiced and both

countries should fulfil their commitments with regard to social sector allocations especially in education and health.

They lamented that military and intelligence establishments of both countries have ruined the peace prospects and both the countries have been wasting their numerous resources on defence and security expenditures. They said that political parties' in both countries pursued their political agenda in the process but people's pressure can help positively engage the political parties to pursue a peace and people-centred agenda. Pro-people and pro-stability people should cooperate and strengthen each other in both countries to help boost cooperation and friendship should prevail between these two countries to ensure people's real freedom from hunger, poverty, exploitation, and discrimination.

The pro-peace forces should make the masses aware, mobilise them and provide them different platforms to raise their voices of friendship and peace.